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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000049

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [KDM](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: FOREIGN MINISTER BLAMES THE U.S. FOR  
THE ABUSE OF U.S. AND NORWEGIAN DIPLOMATS IN NAKHCHIVAN

REF: A. BAKU 27  
[1](#)B. BAKU 32

Classified By: Charge Donald Lu, for reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: During Ambassador Morningstar's January 15 meeting with Foreign Minister Mammadyarov, Charge took the opportunity to draw the Minister's attention to the recent incident in Nakhchivan (ref A) and the Charge's earlier discussion with Deputy Foreign Minister Sadiqov. The exchange was frank, if a bit heated at times, and the Minister was not hesitant to express his ire at statements made by the USG condemning the incident in the press. Charge repeatedly returned to the question of the safety of diplomats visiting Nakhchivan. He noted that the Embassy had properly notified the MFA in advance of the visit. The Foreign Minister claimed that the U.S. Embassy had provoked this incident and was unwittingly now being used to support radicalism in the region. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) At the conclusion of a January 15 meeting between Ambassador Morningstar and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mammadyarov (ref B), Charge raised his meeting earlier that day with Deputy Minister Vagif Sadiqov regarding Poloff's recent visit to Nakhchivan, where she experienced threats and harassment. The Charge explained to Minister Mammadyarov that in their meeting, Sadiqov had requested the Embassy coordinate better with the MFA in Baku when Mission staff is travelling to Nakhchivan, rather than to work directly and solely through the MFA representative located in Nakhchivan. The Charge further explained that the Embassy wanted to avoid any such incidents in the future and was happy to be transparent about travel plans in exchange for a commitment that steps would be taken to protect traveling diplomats.

[1](#)3. (C) The issue was clearly a sore point for Mammadyarov as he proceeded to lambast the Charge for the Embassy's press release, stating that "as a friend" the Embassy should have brought the matter to the MFA's attention directly, rather than airing the dirty laundry in the press. The Charge explained to Mammadyarov that calls to the MFA, the Presidential Apparatus and Ministry of the Interior prior to issuing the press release went unanswered. Mammadyarov accused the Embassy of being "used" by forces (presumably Iran) which were trying to undermine Azerbaijan.

[1](#)4. (C) Mammadyarov further rebuked the Charge saying twice that the suggestion that the government did not protect diplomats "hurt me personally." Mammadyarov also "reserved the right" to issue his own press release, which he did that same evening. MFA official press releases condemned the visit to Nakhchivan and resulting press release for interfering in internal affairs, overly politicizing events and violating the Vienna Convention.

## BACKGROUND

15. (C) On January 13, Poloff, a political LES and the DCM of the Norwegian Embassy in Baku were harassed by an angry crowd while visiting the village of Bananiyar in the autonomous exclave of Nakhchivan to investigate an allegation of police brutality in conjunction with a local observance of the Ashura ceremony (ref B). On approaching the village the private vehicle carrying the group was confronted by a mob of approximately 50 people. Some of the mob pounded on the car with their fists, damaging the vehicle. Others shouted that the diplomats should leave, that everything was fine in the village, and that the United States should not support Armenia. After Poloff and the others exited the car, at least one of the crowd grabbed the LES. After the diplomats departed, some of the mob chased behind them in cars. Plainclothes observers, likely from the local security service, took no/no action. No/no uniformed police were in the vicinity.

## COMMENT

16. (C) When faced with an embarrassing or distasteful incident, the general reaction has been to blame the victim in Azerbaijan. It is true of a dozen human rights incidents over the past year and this is yet another example. The Foreign Minister is particularly concerned about this incident because it pointed to the incompetence (or worse) of MFA staff in Nakhchivan who green lighted the visit and

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perhaps were complicit in organizing the hostile reception. The strong pushback is also symptomatic of the increasing strains on U.S.-Azerbaijan relations in the wake of the ongoing Turkey-Armenia Reconciliation Process.

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